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'Poverty' explosion a mask for rampant corruption

By ZHAO HONGYI

Beijing Today Staff

The China Dream is in trouble according to a recent report by *The Mirror*.

The investigative report, published on February 7, said the number of impoverished counties in China rose from 331 in 1985 to 592 in 2012.

This purported slide into poverty runs contrary to three decades of explosive economic growth and seriously clashes with the government's official reporting of 98.9 million people in poverty nationwide.

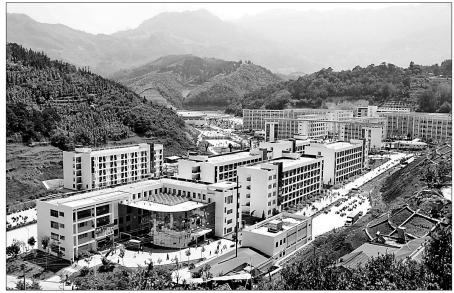
But rather than unmasking a hidden class of impoverished citizens, The Mirror's reporters may have stumbled up one of the nation's most audacious channels for corruption.

In 1985, the central government put forward a policy that would replace handouts with generous funding for projects intended to "develop the local economy" in China's poorest counties. The incentive was designed to bring the countryside in line with the nation's greater market reforms.

Initially, "poor counties" were defined as those where the average annual household income was less than 150 yuan: \$51 at the time, or \$110 in today's money.

The nationwide average, by comparison, was 858 yuan per household.

The number of listed counties has grown slowly in the years since. In most years, about 30 counties graduate from the list to



Malipo County in Yunnan Province has been on the poverty list for decades. The county spent 300 million yuan building a university campus in the valley to attract students. But none have ever attended.

be replaced by new developing regions.

On the surface, the policy appeared to be working. In 2012, the government revised the policy and bumped the baseline average household income to less than 2,300 yuan per year.

But the poverty list is based on selfreporting rather than census data, and local officials have a strong incentive to present their communities as ailing to tap into the vast cash reserves of the central government.

Many "poor counties," especially those along the eastern coast, applied for poverty status to win subsidy money for bogus projects.

An increasing trend in corruption over the last decade resulted in billions of yuan earmarked for good causes to pour into the pockets of county officials.

Hailun County in Heilongjiang Province, Lixin County in Anhui Province, Taiqian

County and Fengqiu County in Henan Province are among the most heinous examples of fund abuse, having directly used poverty relief funds to purchase promotions, erect gaudy government offices and construct lavish homes for local officials.

Little evidence exists that any subsidy money was used used as intended.

Taiqian County was awarded an annual budget of more than 80 million yuan in 2011 – a year when its average annual income was 7,200 yuan in the cities and 2,650 yuan in the countryside.

As government officials built themselves luxury apartments and a new massive administrative complex, more than 600 students were left packed into one small dormitory. Their classrooms had no windows to shield them from the elements.

When reporters asked school officials why the classrooms did not have windows, they were told the school could not afford them.

The school was located next door to the new government complex.

Wang Jingbo, deputy director of the Chinese Law School, said that the central government is revising its poverty targets to move more wealthy counties off the list in hopes that the funds go where they are truly needed.

"We have to focus our spending on real projects that push development in the right direction," he said. "This phenomenon can't be allowed to persist."

City plans 10 percent boost for pensions

By ZHAO HONGYI

Beijing Today Staff

The Beijing Municipal Bureau of Human Resources & Social Security announced its plan to raise the minimum salary in Beijing from 1,400 yuan to 1,560 yuan, an increase of 160 yuan, or 11.4 percent.

The raise would make Beijing second after Shanghai, whose minimum salary is pinned at 1,620 yuan per month.

The increase is expected to benefit some 3.11 million retirees, migrant workers, housekeepers and temporary employees.

Beijing raised its minimum salary to 1,400 last year. In 2008, the minimum salary was still 800 yuan.

Minimum salary is defined at the local level to ensure workers can receive the minimum wage needed to protect their livelihood.

Each province or municipality defines its own minimum salary each year. Shenzhen provides 1,500 yuan and Guangdong 1.550 yuan.

The government also increased its sub-



Inadequate pensions continue to be a big problem. Many elders have to rely on sorting trash to scrape out a living.

CFP Photo

sidy for disabled persons from 3,081 yuan to 3,390 yuan, an increase of 10.2 percent. Caretakers received a 9 percent boost to 1,819 yuan.

The three pension increases will place an addition 26-million-yuan burden on the social welfare fund.

City residents are eligible for a 430 yuan

pension and rural residents a 350 yuan pension, the bureau said. Beijing has raised its minimum salary and pension each year from 2008 to ensure the salaries received by the elders and the disabled can catch up with inflation.

The increases raise the cost of social welfare by 409 million yuan each month. Districts and counties are required to bear the burden.

The State Council said it would create a mechanism to increase pension payments by 10 percent each year. The policy changes will benefit 74 million retired workers.

But pensions remain a point of criticism. While former government employees continue to enjoy 80 to 90 percent of their salary after retirement, normal workers receive only 10 to 20 percent.

Rural residents, while covered by the national insurance plan, recieve only several hundred yuan per month.

The State Council said it would unify the city workers' and rural residents' pension systems this year. It has yet to explain how.

FEATURE February 14, 2014

Tencent and Alibaba step up platform war

By BAO CHENGRONG

Beijing Today Staff

Forget Google and Bing: Tencent and Alibaba have locked horns in what could become the IT world's fiercest battle of 2014.

The two giants have made traditional Chinese habits into a digital battleground in an attempt to pull more private money into their respective payment platforms.

Last month, Tencent began allowing users to send red envelopes with real money over its WeChat platform. On January 17, Alibaba responded by offering a similar service on Sina Weibo using its Alipay third-party payment platform.

The holiday season saw many users tying their bank accounts to WeChat to send or receive red envelopes, said Zhao Nan, a China Citic Bank employee. Users unwilling to connect a bank account could use any money they received to pay for phone service, Tencent said.

But the red envelopes are only the latest avenue of promotion and competition.

Tencent began edging into Alibaba's territory last year by forming partnerships with Didi Taxi and Haidilao Hotpot.

Zhao said the Didi Taxi partnership is the result of Tencent pumping 80 million yuan into the popular app. To promote the platform, Tencent is taking a 20 yuan loss on each taxi trip by awarding users and drivers 10 yuan each for completing their transaction on WeChat.

A similar agreement with Haidilao Hotpot allows diners to save 10 yuan when they pay through WeChat.

The company's third avenue of promotion is Licaitong, a money management tool into which WeChat invested 50,000 yuan. Licaitong offers an interest rate of 6.73 percent, far more than the bank average of 0.385 percent.

Now Tencent is headed for the US.

On January 25, WeChat sent a message to all US users to inform them that binding a Google account to WeChat and adding five contacts by the end of the month would win a \$25 Restaurant.com Gift Card.

But strong competition from Line and WhatsApp have hindered WeChat's adoption. Line, created by a Korean company, boasts 330 million users. WhatsApp has 430 million active users



WeChat's promotion in the US

阅读全文

is cooperating with McDonald's, Nike and KFC. The company has also hired soccer star Lionel Andrés Messi as its brand representative. Lionel's TV ad will soon be airing in 15 countries.

Alibaba may be aiming for a different market. The partnership with Sina Weibo puts it at the center of China's second largest network, and one with a very different demographic.

Its Alipay also has much stronger brand awareness, and the ability to scan a matrix barcode to complete a payment makes its smartphone software much more useful. Alibaba is courting more offline stores to add a matrix barcode to

Online-to-offline sellers can also use Sina's Weibo platform to share matrix barcodes for their products.

The utility and user base may be why Alibaba was willing to invest 586 billion vuan into Sina Weibo.



Beijing Beauty 21



Beijing Beauty 04



Beijing Beauty 15



Beijing Beauty 03

Trapped in t

By ZHAO HONGYI

Beijing Today Staff

While many of the galleries at 798 Art Zone remain closed on an extended holiday, New Sun Art Museum are already introducing new exhibitions.

Both are focused on domestic artists who incorporate traditional lifestyles and national memory in their wo

Traditional girls and ladies

Beijing has been the capital of China for centuries. As a legacy of its imperial past and royal residents, the capital has long focused on a life of luxury and leisure.

When Old Beijingers read, most of their books focused on philosophy or etiquette.

That's the attitude Liu Jianhua tried to capture in his oil works, where scrawled on the walls behind his "beauties" are traditional-sounding verses about how women prefer a lazy and easy life.

And more controversially, that seems to be how Liu believes Beijing women should be have today.

Liu sees modern women as corrupted by rampant consumerism and a need to always be keeping up with the Wangs — an attitude that drives all of society to be too nearsighted to recognize a road bound for financial ruin.

Liu was born in 1962 in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province. Like most northern men, Liu is deeply chauvinistic and certain that he and other men have the right to define what women should or should not be.

He views the changes in northern women as the result of ominous, corrupting influence seeping in from south of the Yangtze River.

Shang Art Gallery When: Through March 5

Where: 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District,

Beijing

Tel: 8459 9449



Beijing Beauty 20



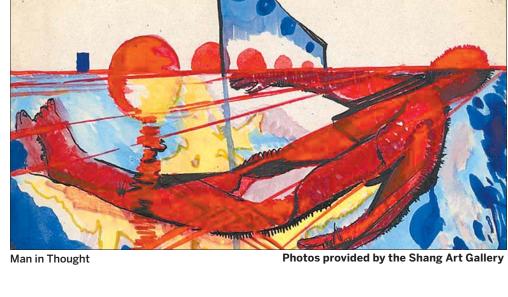
Beijing Beauty 14



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Yang Shufeng's engravings of the 1980s

If you only gave Yang Shufeng's engraving prints a short glance, his work would come off as a confused mess.

The chaotic lines and objects seem to purposefully confound whatever message Yang hopes to send. But in that confusion lies the real message: one of depression, anger, disappointment and rebellion.

Yang came of age during the 1980s, an era much removed from the misery of the 1960s and 1970s, when the decade-long Cultural Revolution smashed the institutions that glued society together. Yang graduated from Northwest Teachers' University in 1982 with a degree in oil painting. But unlike most of his peers, Yang never lost his hope.

Looking at his work it may appear a contradictory message, but his bright colors in a gray atmosphere represent a kernel of aspiration and positivity in an otherwise gray world.

"Only after the looking back on the old days can we continue to strive for the future," Yang said at the ceremony of his solo exhibition. "If a person and a nation do not look back to the road they came, neither has any future."

Yang's art is an abstract about the promise of hope and how it is essential for a future.

The solo exhibition displays some of Yang's other works such as his oil paintings and pottery in the same theme.

Yang is considered a member of the '85 Pioneering Arts movement, a contemporary wave that prioritized representational expressionism in oil, lacquer, paper, woodcarving and pottery.

During his first five years as an artist he created 200 works, including his Person series, Body series, Intertwisted Body series and Red and Black Abstract series.

From 1985 to 1989 his work was continually exhibited. Since then, he has moved into new representational expressionism and begun providing detailed notes about his creations and their artistic goals.

This exhibition marks the first time Yang's post-1989 creations have ever appeared in public.

New Sun Art Museum

When: Through February 20
Where: D10, East Road, 798 Art Zone,
2 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District,
Beijing

Tel: 5978 9497, 5978 9847



Patient Bed



Family



Photos provided by New Sun Art Museum

Finding the face of poverty

By ANNIE WEI

Beijing Today Staff

Last month, Jiangnan Yiling, editor-inchief of Size Outdoor magazine, spoke at UCCA about his travels and the inspiration for his charity projects.

Jiangnan speaks with a strong southern accent. From the age of 10, he often traveled with his father to snowy mountains, harsh deserts, Buddhist shrines and the Tibetan steppe.

A visit to an elementary school in Yushu, Qinghai Province changed his life in 2009.

"I was traveling for fun that day. We were driving in the mountains when we bumped into this portable school," he said.

The "school" was little more than a traveling tent that moved about the plateau to offer classes to the local children.

"The contrast between developing regions like Guangdong and Jiangsu and truly isolated areas was simply shocking," Jiangnan said.

The encounter inspired his documentary project to spend 5 to 10 years on the road, recording village life, documenting living conditions and boosting awareness of poverty.

Since 2010, Jiangnan has visited nearly 50 impoverished regions across the country to photograph the conditions, learn from the locals and expand his knowledge.

For the UCCA lecture, he selected the 10 most touching places he visited to highlight for the audience.

His personal stories painted a very different picture of China's development than the one portrayed in official media.

When Jiangnan revisited Yushu after the quake, he learned about the local government's wild corruption and its plan to use the disaster to grab more land. He recorded the terrible conditions of the migrants and the struggles of the rescue team, many of whom fell ill due to alti-

His personal account is raw and unedited, written based on his first impressions rather than digested and refined.

Many people who attended the lecture said they were interested in helping to work as vol-

"Speaking for myself, I do not support the idea of being a short-term volunteer teacher," he said. "The more you see, the more you become aware that one person's ability to make a difference is so small and so limited."

That feeling is part of why he began the project: awareness is the first step in building a system that can provide real support, he said.

The massive turnover in volunteer teachers carries its own burden for the community, much of which consists of children who are left behind with aging, ailing grandparents as their only caretakers.

Jiangnan said he plans to visit all 468 of the government's officially recognized impoverished counties. Along the way he will record and publish the contact information of children in need.

Although his projects has several sponsors, the majority of his work is entirely self-funded.

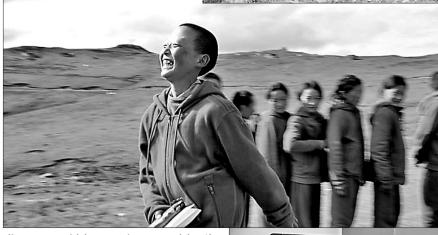
To learn more about Jiangnan's project or his documentary, you can visit his websites at ngophoto.org or bbs.8264.com.



The home of an elderly woman who has been left behind



recording stories of locals on his travels to every impoverished region.



Jiangnan said he was impressed by the children's joy over receiving books after the quake.



For him, for her Asweet Valentine



Beijing Today Staff

Price tags are never the point of sending a gift, instead it's the sincerity, the love and the care it represents.

This week, *Beijing Today* scouted out a few gifts you can use tonight if you're still searching for something special.



If your sweetheart was born in the Year of the Horse, traditional superstition suggests this will be a most unlucky year.

The antidote? More red! Red is a happy color associated with chasing away demons and other unpleasant things.

Not a horse? Not a problem. Most women still melt when they get a gift of a red or pink dress, handbag or fancy lingerie.

Stockings are never that expensive when purchased on line. A set of colorful stockings will put her on top of the latest fashion trend and make for a practical gift.

Nail polish can also work well. If you're like most men, you have no idea which brands are good.

Channel is an obvious choice, but a 15 milliliter bottle will set you back nearly 300 yuan in China. We recommend other options that can be found online, such as Deborah Lippmann. The company offers rich colors and a fast drying formula.

The Deborah Lippmann gel lab set (170 yuan) is quite unique. More and more girls like getting gel manicures because they look shinier and last longer.

However, also many people are against gel manicures from a health perspective. Deborah Lippmann's gel lab (base and top coat) is like other polishes but creates a gel look.

For him

It can be tricky to find a gift for the man in your life.

Although men claim to be simpler, women often find themselves second guessing the state of their relationship and whether a gift will scare him off.

Keep it simple and fun at the beginning.

Consider a pair of Oliver Peoples vintage glasses, a chic, cute and nerdy look. You could also get a Brooks Brothers' bow-tie: it's small but lovely, and it won't leave him worried that you plan to invade his closet.

For something more personal, consider simply framing one of your favorite vacation photos.





Colorful stockings



Deborah Lippmann nail polish starts from 105 yuan.



Oliver Peoples vintage glasses



Brooks Brothers' bow-tie

CFP Photos



Dining Out

Korean romance spawns interest in street food

Beijing Today Staff

The South Korean drama My Love from the Star has found a lot of fans in China with its romantic scenes, well-written plot and beautiful actors.

Actress Gianna Jun, best known across Asia for her role in the romantic comedy My Sassy Girl (2001), stars as the female lead Cheon Song-Yi.

Fans have been picking apart Cheon's wardrobe for fashion inspiration, as well as rediscovering Korean street food favorites like fried chicken and beer or raw seafood marinated in sov sauce.

BasakanFried Chicken

Where: Room 126, Youlehui C, 603 Wangjingyuan, Chaoyang District **When**: Daily, 10 am – 10 pm

Tel: 5249 8977

DaluKorean Barbecue

Where: East gate of WangjingXiyuanSanqu, Futong Xi Dajie, Chaoyang

When: Daily, 10 am - 10 pm Tel: 6478 6029

Fried chicken and Korean beer

Although bird flu scares may have kept chicken off many tables during Chinese New Year, they did not affect business at the friedchicken eatery in Wangjing.

The take-out shop is operated by a Korean and serves deep-fried chicken wings and legs. Fried chicken legs are 75 yuan, with wing and leg combos priced 90 yuan. Mixed original and spicy chicken wings cost 90 yuan, with a 10-yuan discount on an all-spicy order.

The chicken is fried immediately after ordering, ensuring it is crispy, juicy and fresh. The taste is much less oily than what you find at fast food chains.

Portion sizes are fairly reasonable. The chicken combo (100 yuan) includes 20 medium wings; the spicy combo (80 yuan) has 10 wings and four legs - enough for two people.

The only drawback is the wait. On weekends, the line drags on for 40 to 60 minutes.

There are plenty of supermarkets selling South Korean beers in Wangjing, so be sure to grab one to go with your chicken.

CFP Photo



Made from the Market

Fiber-rich dishes for fat burning

By ANNIE WEI

Beijing Today Staff

Spring is coming, and with it the time for working off your winter fat. To make the most out of the season, stick to fresh vegetables and leafy greens.

For 9-to-5 young professionals, buying and preparing greens can be a costly prospect - especially when you are stuck in a tiny apartment.

Cabbage is a fiber-rich vegetable that keeps easily. When the temperature is low enough you can store it in your balcony or outside the door. Cabbage is cheap and heavy, so no one bothers to steal it.

Beijing's local cabbage used to be juicy and delicious, but industrial farming has reduced it to a bland mess.

But with the right seasonings, even the humble cabbage can become a noble dish.

All you need are some easily-stored ingredients like dry seaweed and scallops. Soak the seaweed for 10 minutes to unroll it, then slice the seaweed and cabbage and cook it together with dried scallops till everything softens.

The dried scallops and seaweed give the dish enough flavor that no extra salt is needed.

There's no technique or skill required, and it goes well with freshly steamed rice.



Dried scallops



Photos by Liu Momo

Marinated raw seafood

Marinated fresh and raw seafood is popular in regions with plentiful fish, crabs and oysters.

Korea's version has a unique flavor. The crabs taste fresh after being marinated in a mixture of soy sauce, mirin, sugar, garlic and ginger for several days

The dish, called ganjang gejang, or salted, fermented seafood, is wonderfully briny, with a hint of spice and ginger.

In the popular TV series, the characters discuss how to eat it "the Korean way:" mix the roe with well-cooked rice for a treat.

Although many Korean restaurants offer this dish, some might require diners to place an order

If you are not sure whether you will like it, you can try it as a free starter at Dalu Korean Barbecue. The crab it provides is small but flavorful.

Dalu also sells marinated crab for take away.